DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 113 822 EA 007 619

AUTHOR Stancato, Frank A.
TITLE Group Cohesiveness and Classroom Instruction: Implications for Open Classroom Practice.
PUB DATE 4 Apr 75
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters (April 4,1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Bibliographies; *Classroom Environment; Discussion (Teaching Technique); Elementary Secondary Education; *Group Dynamics; *Group Unity; *Open Education; Peer Acceptance; Self Actualization; Social Psychology

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper are to focus on the property of group cohesiveness as a positive force affecting students' cognitive and personal growth, and to draw some implications from the research on cohesiveness for teachers who employ open classroom techniques. A bibliography is included. (Author/MLF)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED113822

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

GROUP COHESIVENESS AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR OPEN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

BY

EA 007 619

Frank A. Stancato, Ph. D.
Associate Professor of Secondary Education
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters on April 4, 1975.

Back (1958) has defined group cohesiveness as the resultant forces which are acting on members to stay in a group; in other words, group cohesiveness is the attraction of membership in a group for its members. Bennett (1963) has maintained that a cohesive group is one in which all members work together for a common goal and are ready to take responsibility for group chores and endure frustration in a cooperative effort. She goes on to say that this property of cohesiveness is called the internal power of a group and is one criterion of a healthy group.

The child's attraction and desire for group activity are shown in the fact that from the sixth grade on, there is a constant increase in the size of groups in which he plays (Pigors, 1935). Psychologists would probably explain this attraction on the basis of a common interest, or a common need. Moreover, to reach and maintain a certain status within the group is one of the vital goals of the individual. Bradford and Lippitt (1946) feel that everyone needs to belong to a cohesive work group where his contributions have meaning and importance to others. Elsewhere, Bradford (1947) maintains that working with others on the serious and personal task of improving one's learning will make for greater cohesiveness and will increase the influence potential of the group on individual members. This position is further substantiated by Bettleheim and Sylvester (1945)

when they wrote, "the security from living within the shelter of a cohesive group often gives the child courage and a reservoir of strength from which the child may gain support for succeeding steps in learning."

The purposes of this paper are: to focus on the property of group cohesiveness as a positive force affecting the cognitive and personal growth outcomes of the school. And second, to draw some implications from the research on cohesiveness for teachers who employ open classroom techniques.

Personal Variables and Group Cohesiveness

According to Lewin (1948) the group to which the individual belongs is the ground for his perceptions and actions. It is the ground of the social group which gives the individual his figure character. Tyron and Henry (1950) mention that in every interpersonal situation there are a series of generalizations about the nature of yourself as a person. Bradford (1964) goes one step further when he says ... "as individuals become members of healthy groups they have resolved the critical question of personal identity." Hence, the covert approval and support found in a cohesive group where the student has interested and reliable friends, would appear to have important, if not essential, characteristics of healthy self development.

If a group offers great satisfaction of a particular need, a person's attraction to the group should vary directly with the strength of that need. Dittes (1959) concludes that persons made to feel well accepted in a group found the group to be more attractive than those made to feel poorly accepted.

Interestingly, this difference was significantly greater among persons with low self esteem than persons with high self esteem. In the same vein, Jackson (1953) reports that the more highly an individual is valued by the group, the greater will be his attraction to his own group. Others, Kelly (1962), and Stotland (1959), conclude that the more prestige a person has within a group, or the more that it appears he might obtain, the more he will be attracted to the group.

It is logical to conclude, therefore, that the individuals feelings about self and attraction to the group will be affected by the extent to which he is accepted and valued by other members in the group.

Classroom Learning and Group Cohesiveness

Lee and Pallone (1966) claim that the classroom should be a learning situation characterized by the cohesion of teacher and pupil engaged in a search for truth, whole and entire. Pursuant to this goal, Thelen (1954) points out that a genuine learning situation involves the emotions of the learner with group conditions determining whether the necessary emotionality will be facilitating or inhibiting. Buswell (1954) concludes that in general, boys and girls who are succeeding in their school work are also succeeding in social relationships with their peers.

There is evidence to indicate that the chance for re-education seems to be increased whenever cohesive forces are created. For example, Coch and French (1958) observe that changed groups with high cohesiveness are the best re-learners. Similarly, Johnson (1963) found that subjects assigned to social reinforcement did as a group increase verbal participation

and in the amount of time utilized in participating.

Although much research exists on variables that increase or decrease cohesiveness in psychological groups, little recent research has been done combining the effects of cohesiveness on actual classroom learning. Shaw and Shaw (1962) showed early spelling scores to be positively correlated with the degree of liking among members of a second grade study group. Comparing the effects of cohesiveness on low and high IQ groups, Lott and Lott (1966) found that high IQ cohesive groups did generally better than high IQ children in low cohesive groups. Interestingly, however, cohesiveness among low IQ children made no difference in learning. More recently, McGinley and McGinley concluded that top reading groups were cohesive as groups and the low reading groups were not. The results seem to indicate that ability grouping may be open to question psychologically since grouping practice often lead to lower cohesiveness (and possibly lower achievement) in middle and low groups. More research is needed, of course, but the general assumption might be drawn that whatever the person does will be done better and with greater benefit to himself and others if he can visualize a group that will give him approval and further the realization of his basic needs. Even though little empirical research has been done on cohesiveness and classroom performance, some implications from the findings of social psychology seem relevant for practicing teachers who are interested in increased openness in their classroom approach.

The Class Discussion

Activities that provide active student involvement, with a chance to establish one's worth with others, are powerful forces for shaping the structure of the instructional group. Moreover, there is evidence to indicate that in order for a person to be attracted to a group, the human relationships and activities must involve him. For example, Farson (1953) found that the degree of attraction to an air force squadron is positively related to attendance and participation of the members. Correspondingly, Wolff (1954) found group attraction to be enhanced if the member's contributions are valued and if the individual perceives them to be valued by other members of the group.

The all class discussion is one activity that lends many exciting possibilities for furthering both group cohesion and classroom learning. According to Lee and Pallone (1966), the teacher who utilizes the all class discussion creates an environment where problems become more meaningful, motivation greater, and learning more effective. In an experiment of high and low cohesiveness, Festinger (1950) found that the more cohesive groups were proceeding at a more intense rate of discussion than the less cohesive groups. Elsewhere, Back (1958) concludes that in high cohesive groups the individuals show a more serious effort to enter discussion than low cohesive groups.

There is also evidence to indicate that group discussion can be effectively applied in the classroom for the purpose of raising scholastic

aspiration. Malory's (1956) analysis of discussion indicated that learning was facilitated as evidenced by an increase in topic centered statements. Similarly, Rickard (1946) concluded that a loss in factual content did not result from the use of discussion method, and that a statistical gain in factual content knowledge was noted. Perhaps it may not be inappropriate to state then that the class discussion is worthy, if not vital, technique in furthering group cohesiveness and classroom learning as well.

Classroom Climate

Bradford and Lippitt (1948) have maintained that the quality and quantity of work is high and the degree of cohesiveness greater in a democratic group. Elsewhere, Lewin (1948) contends that every individual in democratic groups show a relatively greater individuality and feeling. To back this up, Lippitt and White (1958) concluded that group members in a democratic social climate were more friendly to each other, showed more group mindedness, and were more work minded than workers in other groups. Examining the effects of cohesion and leadership, Schumer (1962) found that when a group is confronted with a relatively complex and long term task, the quality and quantity of productivity depends on the emergence of an effective leader and not necessarily on the extent to which the group is cohesive. Therefore, the ideal leadership behavior of the teacher may require in Jenken's (1960, p. 175) words, "the skill in presenting the requirements in such a way that they can be understood and accepted while at the same time not making use of his power and authority."

Because members of a cohesive group are more strongly motivated to remain members, we would expect a greater fear of rejection and consequently greater conformity to group norms. Festinger (1950) notes that the pressures toward uniformity will be greater the more dependent the various members are on the group. Some light is shed on this topic by Gibb (1960, p. 135) when he says:

> ...in early stages of the development of cohesion there is likely to be a strong demand on the individual to conform because of loyalty and attraction to the group. However, the process of establishing maturity along the cohesion dimension is the process of finding an activity in the group for which the individual is best fitted and also finding enough freedom to move in and out of the activity in building relationships with other members. The mark of this relationship may be reflected in the functional use of "we" as indicating a genuine acceptance of the relationship.

In the same sense, Morse (1960) maintains that in our culture setting, a classroom with mutual acceptance and a sense of freedom to differ can develop high cohesion without necessary conformity. As a final note on this topic, McKeachie (1954) points out that the ability to differentiate between areas where conformity is necessary and where it is not may be an important dimension related to the group's effectiveness in problem solving. It would appear to follow then, that a healthy classroom cohesiveness is related to the flexibility of the teacher in leading the group and the ability to establish enough individual freedom of movement within group activities.

Grouping Size

As members of a small group, students are usually quick to perceive that both learning and feeling about self have new meaning. Arthur Combs (1972) has described this social dimension as the "meaning" half of the learning equation. The other half of the Combs equation has to do with information to which meaning is attached. In addition, small grouping procedures allow the participant more individual freedom to participate. Tannenbaum (1968) reports that an individual's attitude to his work is changed not because he has been given more control or influence, rather, because he has more freedom to actively participate. Other studies, Shellhaas (1967) and Deutsch and Collins (1958), have demonstrated that social contact leads not only to improved attitudes toward work but an increased preference toward group members as well. Studying the influence of group interaction in a camp setting, Shellhaas (1967) found the smaller group to be of a greater advantage in getting individuals to choose each other as friends. His results are sharply consistent with Homan's hypothesis of quantitative relationship between interaction and sentiment which stated: "if the frequency of interaction between two or more persons increases the degree of liking for one another will increase and vice versa."

Considering the many possible criteria of success for the acquisition of knowledge and individual participation, Jorgenson (1973) has recommended a group size of three. In a classic study of group size, Slater (1958) concluded that groups of five were, at least from the subjects point of view, most effective in dealing with intellectual tasks.

The foregoing discussion on group size strongly suggests that frequency of social contact, and interpersonal attraction, are more likely to occur in a small group.

Implications for Open Classroom Practice

The literature is replete with efforts to define open classrooms (Bleir 1972; Featherstone 1971; Gatewood 1974; Ruidi and West 1973). While most of the definitions may vary on the surface in terms of degree, structure or emphasis they all tend to reflect a common set of ideas. All seem to agree on the importance of 1) active student involvement in learning activities, 2) social interaction and encouragement by peers, and 3) self development.

The following implications drawn from the findings of social psychology seem relevant for consideration by open classroom educators.

1. The characteristics of a cohesive work group would appear to be an important, if not essential force, affecting optimum classroom learning and self development as well.

2. The individual's attraction to the group (cohesiveness) will be enhanced to the extent to which the individual student is an active participant whose contributions have meaning and value to others.

3. The utilization of learning activities (group discussion etc.) where students have the opportunity to move in and out of the activity in building relationships with others has the potential for establishing high cohesiveness without necessary conformity.

4. Small group procedures (3 to 5 members) that allow greater individual participation and social interaction have the potential for increasing group cohesiveness and the degree of liking for one another within the group.

Bibliography

Back, K., "Influence Through Social Communication," Readings in Social Psychology, E. Macaby, T. Newcomb and E. Hartley, editors (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958)

Bennett, M., Guidance and Counseling in Groups (New York: McGraw Hill Co., 1963

Bettleheim, B. and Sylvester, E., "Therapeutic Influence of the Group on the Individual," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 17 (1947) pp. 690-692

Bleir, M., et. al. "A Comparison of Yielding to Influence in Open and Traditional Classrooms." Childhood Education (1972): 45-50.

Bradford, L. and Lippett, R. "Building a Democratic Work Group," Personnel, 22 (1945-46) p. 147

Bradford, L. "Group Forces Affecting Learning," Perspectives on the Group Process, C.G. Kemp, editor (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964)

Buswell, M., "The Relationship Between the Social Structure of the Classroom and the Academic Success of the Pupils," Journal of Experimental Education, 22 (1954) p. 51

Coch, L. and French, J., "Overcoming Resistance to Change," Readings in Social Psychology, E. Macaby, T. Newcomb and E. Hartley, editors (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958)

Combs, A., "Humanizing Education: The Person in the Process," Humanizing Education, R. Sleeper, editor (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development 22nd Annual Conference, Washington, D.C., February, 1972) pp. 73-88

Deutsch, M. and Collins, M.E., "The Effects of Public Policy in Housing Projects Upon Interracial Attitudes," Readings in Social Psychology, E. Macaby, T. Newcomb and E. Hartley, editors (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1958)

Dittes, J., "Attractiveness of Group as a Function of Self Esteem and Acceptance by Group," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 59 (1959) p. 77

Farson, C., "Participation in Adult Groups: The Relations Between Participation and Valence in Two Air Force Reserve Squadrons," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1953)

Featherstone, J., "Open Schools: The British and Us: Excerpts from Booklets, Informal Schools in Britain Today," New Republic 165 (1971) pp. 520-25.

Festinger, L., "Informal Social Communication," Psychological Review, 57 (1950) p. 275

Gatewood, T.E., "Opening Up the Middle School Classroom: A Practical Plan," Impact on Instructional Improvement (1974) pp. 41-44

Gibby, J.W., "Sociopsychological Processes of Group Instruction," The Dynamics of Instructional Groups, the Fifty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II (Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1960)

Jackson, J. M., "Analysis of Interpersonal Relations in a Formal Organization," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1953)

Jenkens, D., "Characteristics and Functions of Leadership in Instructional Groups," The Dynamics of Instructional Groups, The Fifth-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II (Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1960)

Johnson, C.J., "The Transfer Effect of Treatment on Group Composition on Pupils' Classroom Participation," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1963)

Jorgenson, B.W., "Group Size: Its Effects on Group Performance and on Individual Acquisition of Knowledge," (Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Convention, Washington, D.C., May 3-5, 1973)

Kelly, H.H., "Communication in Experimentally Created Hierarchies," Group Dynamics, D. Cartwright and A. Zander, editors (New York: Row Peterson and Company, 1962)

Lee, J.M., and Pallone, N.J., Guidance and Counseling in Schools: Foundations and Processes (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966)

Lewin, K., Resolving Social Conflicts (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948

Lippitt, R. and White, R., "An Experimental Study of Leadership and Group Life," Readings in Social Psychology, E. Macaby, T. Newcomb and E. Hartley, editors (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1958)

Lott, A. and Lott, B., "Group Cohesiveness, Communication Level and Conformity," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 62 (1961), pp. 408-412

Malory, R.M., "Group Learning Through Group Discussion: A Group Discussion Implementation Analysis," Journal of Social Psychology, 43(1956) pp. 10-11

McGinley and McGinley, H., "Reading Groups as Psychological Groups," The Journal of Experimental Education, 39 (Winter, 1970) pp. 35-42.

McKeachie, W.J., "Individual Conformity to Attitude of Classroom Groups," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 49 (1954) pp. 286-287

Morse, W., "Diagnosing and Guiding Relationships Between Group and Individual Members," The Dynamics of Instructional Groups, The Fifty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1960)

Pigors, P. Leadership on Domination, (New York: Houghton Miffling Company, 1935)

Rickard, P., "An Experimental Study of the Effectiveness of Group Discussion in the Teaching of Factual Content," Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations, 14 (1946) p. 75

Schumer, H., "Leadership in Small Groups as Related to Group Productivity," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1961)

Shaw, M.E., and Shaw, L., "Some Effects of Sociometric Grouping Upon Learning in a Second Grade Classroom," Journal of Social Psychology, 57 (1962) pp. 453-458

Shellhaas, L.H., et al., "Adaptive Behavior: A New Dimension in the Classification of the Mentally Retarded," Mental Retardation Abstracts, 4 (1967) pp. 359-387

Slater, P.E., "Contrasting Correlates of Group Size," Sociometry, 25 (1958) pp. 129-139

Stotland, E., "Determinants of Attraction to Groups," Journal of Social Psychology, 49 (1959) pp. 78-79

Tannenbaum, A.S., Control in Organizations (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968)

Thelen, H.A., "Educating Children Through Need Meeting Activity," Dynamics of Groups at Work (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954)

Tyron, C. and Henry, W., "How Children Learn Personal and Social Adjustment," Learning and Instruction, The Forty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1950)

Wolff, Robert J., "The Value of Member Contributions as a Determinant of Attraction to a Group," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1953)